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C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT AU PRINCE 001481

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STATE FOR WHA/CAR
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STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CAR
INR/IAA (BEN-YEHUDA)
TREASURY FOR JEFFREY LEVINE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/09/2011
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [HA](#)
SUBJECT: PPREVAL TO GANGS: DISARM OR DIE

REF: PAUP 1460

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Six days after announcing he preferred "dialogue" to a military solution, President Preval on August 9 publicly demanded that gangs "surrender their arms or die" in a surprise visit to Cite Militaire, a Port-au-Prince slum adjacent to the gang stronghold of Cite Soleil. Preval's visit and statement came as a surprise -- MINUSTAH officials told the Ambassador that the request from Preval to arrange security came only on the morning of the visit -- but the media reported Preval mixing with local residents delighted to see their president and chanting in favor of disarmament. A sampling of opinion from an embassy reception the same evening, revealed relief and support for the president's statement, including from many elites who are prone to distrust him. Presidential Counselor Gabriel Varret told Polcouns that the statement reflected what Preval had been saying in private for weeks. "The president is stubborn. He's decided these guys will disarm."

¶2. (C) Prime Minister Alexis told the Ambassador at the same reception that Preval's statement was a "clear and definitive" step forward in dealing with the gangs. Discussions with gang leaders had been ongoing but only to make clear that they had to either take the carrot or face the stick. The PM maintained that offering the gangs an alternative was still the "most reasonable" policy. The communities where gangs were entrenched needed to see that the government was not ignoring their concerns and intended to better their condition.

¶3. (C) The PM related that security remained the government's top priority; that he and the president were working from "six until midnight" to find a solution. Consultation and cooperation with MINUSTAH on security strategy was comprehensive, and the president had full confidence in MINUSTAH's ability to take necessary action. MINUSTAH and Haitian police (HNP) had, as of the morning of August 8, completely secured airport road. He would appear at the chamber of deputies the senate in the following two days with the Senior Committee for the National Police (CSPN -- composed of the PM, the ministers of justice and interior, the state secretary for public security, and the police

director general) to brief parliament on the government's security policy. He had delayed this appearance, though parliament had criticized him, until he had something concrete to report.

14. (C) Comment. Preval claimed that his previous statement regarding dialogue had been misunderstood. But the negative reaction to his support for dialogue and continuing violence over the past six days, particularly on airport road, seem to finally have put Preval in a position where he had to forcefully respond. Polcouns on August 8 suggested to presidential advisor Alix Fils-Aime that the government was heading toward a crisis. "It is a crisis," he responded, and the people are losing confidence in our ability to respond by the day." Prime Minister Alexis is also somewhat vindicated by Preval's public statement. His tough talk at the end of July that the government would insist on "the carrot or the stick" seemed toothless in the context of Preval's silence and government inaction. Preval on August 8 arranged for another meeting with gang leaders at the palace (sources vary whether three or four appeared), which presidential advisor Robert Manual indicated to the Ambassador did not produce results. With Preval also highlighting in his statement that the HNP had killed 17 "bandits" earlier in the week in areas immediately adjacent to Cite Soleil, Preval appears to have resolved to confront the Cite Soleil gangs if necessary.
SANDERSON